

"THE WORD OF GOD" interpreted by "THE CHURCH OF GOD" the
appointed means of preparing for the Last Judgment.

SERMONS

PREACHED

In the Church of the Holy Trinity,

TORONTO,

ON THE FOUR SUNDAYS IN ADVENT, 1868,

BY

WILLIAM STEWART DARLING,

RECTOR ASSISTANT.

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

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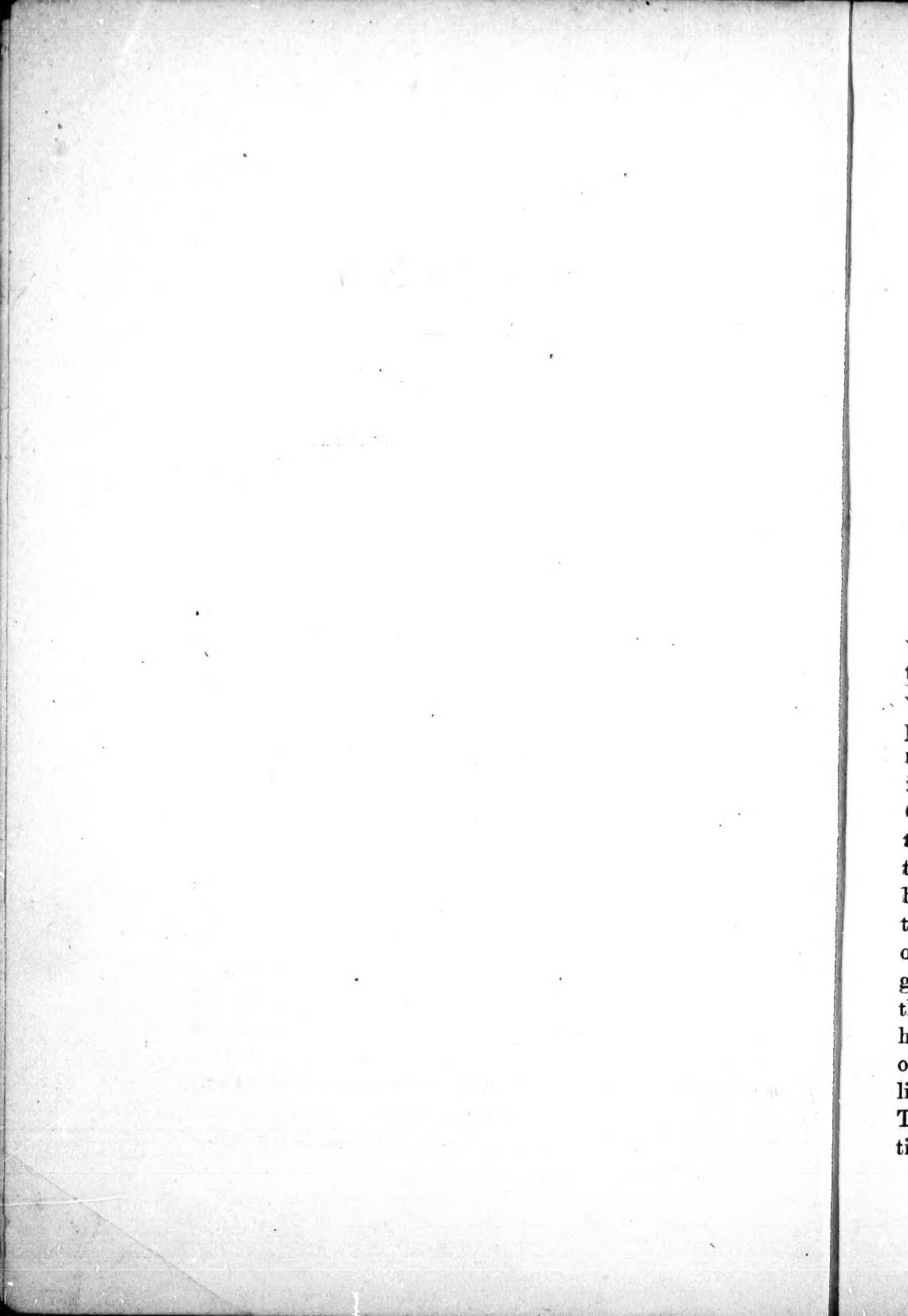
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SERMONS.

ADVENT SUNDAY, 1868.

THE SOLEMNITIES OF THE LAST GREAT DAY.

ISAIAH II, 19.

"And they shall go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth for fear of the Lord, for the glory of His majesty when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth."

Again, my brethren, the Advent season with all its solemn warnings is upon us. The lesson from which the text is taken, though referring in its primary application to the judgment which God inflicted upon His ancient people for their multiplied rebellions, will have a future and more complete fulfilment at the judgment day, and hence the appropriateness of its selection for the present season. The whole tone of the Church's services is changed—they no longer speak to us as they have lately done, of the calm, ordinary, every day duties which man owes to his fellow man, for the love of Christ, but they startle us with the thought of judgment and the terrors of the last great day. They remind us that He who once came in great humility to redeem, will come again in glorious majesty to judge the world. Concerning this coming there is no word of doubt, no tone of uncertainty, no trace of hesitation. He will surely come; as surely as the shades of night are now brooding over us; as surely as we are now living men and women, so surely every eye shall see Him. There is no possibility of escaping from those dread solemnities, no whither to flee where His hand shall not reach

us. From the holes of the rocks, from the caves of the earth, yea, though the hills should fall on us and the mountains should cover us, we shall be brought forth to receive the just reward of our deeds. From the still graves of quiet churchyards; from fields of mortal strife, where thousands upon thousands have found their last resting place; from the depths of the unfathomed sea, we shall be summoned; and at that summons, both the earth and ocean shall give up their dead, and in the twinkling of an eye the living shall be changed. Whoever, whatever, wherever we may be we shall be called with a word of power that shall prove to be irresistible. Though our ears may have been for ages deaf even to the voices of the thunder or the earthquake, that voice which shall then ring throughout the world shall arouse us from our slumber, and whether we will or not we must come forth—you, and you, and I, to be judged for the things done in the body. Oh, what a dream, do we for the most part hold this to be! How hard to give it anything like reality! We think of it as something which may, perhaps, happen to others, but hardly as a scene in which we shall take part. But it is not so, it is not so my brethren! *We* shall see it in all its dread solemnity—it will one day—we cannot tell what day—break upon us either amid our workday ongoings, or it shall arouse us from our sleep even if it has lasted a thousand years, and oh, what a waking *that* will be! To see the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and hear the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God declaring that time shall be no longer. Oh, how strange a being is man, who, with all this before him—with the absolute, inevitable certainty of judgment to come, can yet put it out of his thoughts, and suffer his mind, and soul and heart, to be taken up, absorbed and carried away by the trifles of this world, the pleasures, the profits, the cares and

the sins of a life like this, so fleeting, so uncertain, so unsatisfactory, even at the very best !

And this is, perhaps, still more wonderful, when we come to remember that judgment is not only certain to come, but that the time of its coming is uncertain. The whole tenor of the New Testament warns us to watch, on this very ground, that we know not when the Son of Man cometh. It speaks to us of the perpetual duty, never to be relaxed, of watching for the day of God. It dwells on the necessity of being ready, not so much for death, as for judgment, and it warns us that our Lord may come at a time when we think not, and at an hour when we are not aware. I have seen it recently pointed out that in this, as in so many other particulars, we have fallen into unscriptural ways, both of speech and thought. We talk of death being the inevitable end of all men, a fact which the Bible does not countenance, inasmuch as it sets forth the coming of the Lord to judgment as the event which shall startle multitudes of *living* men, amidst their usual avocations, so that a thousand millions of our race shall probably never know by experience what is meant by death. Yet this momentous event is little thought of. We are apt to say "Where is the promise of His coming, for all things continue as they were from the foundation of the world," and this unbelief of the nearness of His coming is foretold as one of the signs that forewarns us that when men are saying peace and safety, then the sudden destruction which shall fall upon unbelievers at the coming of the Lord, may be close at hand.

We, my brethren, have fallen upon strange times, and to many a thoughtful mind they look as though we were upon the verge of the last days. I cannot now advert to what these tokens are, but seeing that He who will come, may come at evening or midnight, at cock crowing or in the morning, therefore let us watch and turn from our sins, and

seek the Lord while He may be found, in those fuller and more frequent services by which the Church marks her solemn Advent-tide. For think how terrible are to be the consequences of that coming, to multitudes, whensoever it shall be. They shall go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth for FEAR of the Lord, and for the glory of His Majesty when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth. And why this terror which shall in that day seize upon the souls of the guilty and unbelieving? Why, but because of the deep and bitter reproaches of their own consciences, warning them with no uncertain voice that judgment for them can end only in condemnation. That voice within, often makes men tremble even *now*—but O, with what awful and irresistible conviction will it speak on that day. And how will it be with us then? How would it be with us *now* if upon the darkness of this present night we should see the sudden dawning of the eternal day, or if to-morrow we were to be startled amidst our worldly employments by a light above the brightness of the sun, and we were to behold all heaven aglow with the radiant forms of the angel host who shall surround the Son of Man when He shall come to judgment? Should we be able to lift up our heads with a solemn joy, in which awe should be tempered with thankfulness, that our warfare was at length accomplished, and that our redemption, our *full* redemption from sin, and evil, and suffering, from weariness and disappointment, and dissatisfaction had at length drawn nigh? Or should we flee to the holes of the rocks and to the caves of the earth, and pray the hills to fall on us and the mountains to cover us from the wrath of the Lamb whose love and long suffering we have neglected or despised?

And who are those who in that day of wrath shall flee away in terror, and with despairing voice and gesture implore the blessing of annihilation? Those, brethren, who are openly

profane—those who are deliberately wicked—those who live without scruple in drunkenness, sensuality, and vice—those who mock at holy things, and scoff at righteousness and the love of God. These and such as these, however bold and daring now in all that is evil, shall flee from the coming of the Son of Man with terror for which words can find no utterance, and yet they shall flee in vain. Those too, whose only standard of right and wrong is that of this evil world—who labor for its gains and live for its pleasures—who scruple not for a moment to break the law of God, if it will advance their interest or add to their enjoyment—who hesitate not at fraud or vice if they can so practice them as to escape the censure of the world: the plausible over-reacher in business—the secret sensualist—the adroit liar—these shall in that day have the flimsy veil with which they seek to conceal their true character rent away for ever, and they shall vainly seek to escape from the wrath of God and of the Lamb.

Those too who would shrink from such a course as these pursue, but who nevertheless have no higher rule of conduct than worldly honor or public opinion; who, though not conspicuously wanting in the ordinary duties which they owe to man, are manifestly wanting in the devotional duties which they owe to God; who have no love for, no longing after heavenly things, and whose regard for, or attention to any religious duties is prompted by a regard for respectability rather than by the fear of God,—what can these do but flee from Him Whom they have neither loved nor served, to the holes of the rocks and to the caves of the earth for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth?

Those too who are practising the sad self-deception upon themselves of being satisfied with some system of religious doctrine, or the observance or non-observance of some re-

ligious forms, without any real deep seated principle in the heart or any real practical consistency in the life, what can there be for *them* in that day but terror, passing words. Oh, my Christian Brethren, let us be anxiously upon our guard against a delusion so dangerous as this. Let us beware of saying Lord, Lord, if our hearts convict us of not trying to do the things which our Lord commands. Let us beware how we comfort ourselves with attendance upon religious rites, even the highest and holiest sacrament of the Gospel, if we are not moved thereto by love and longing to grow, through the grace of the Lord, into the image of the Saviour's holiness.

And now, do we discover any features of our own character in these several classes? The openly wicked, the secretly sinful, the worldly man destitute of the love of Christ, or the self deluded Christian who is vainly putting the profession or the form of Godliness in the place of the power of it? If so let us awake from our sins ere it be too late. We know not how soon it *may* be too late. The rolling of the Lord's chariot wheels as He comes to Judgment might arouse us this very night, and O then it will be too late to cry for mercy when it is the time of Judgment. O men of evil lives! who put the thought of God far from you, what will your wickedness profit when He comes to take vengeance on those who know Him not, and the day of repentance is forever past and over? O men of double dealing and of hidden sin! what shall ye do in that day when every disguise shall be stripped away, and ye shall stand naked and shuddering before the great White Throne? O men of worldly devices and worldly honor! who have never thought of, nor cared for the love of God, what shall ye answer Him who died that He might teach you to do right, not for your own reputation but for the love of Him? O men of zeal for some special sys-

tem of doctrine, or for or against some outward form of worship—who have praised God with your lips while you have dishonored Him in your lives! how shall ye endure that day when you shall stand before Him in your true character to whom you have come so near but whom still you have never known? Oh, my Christian Brethren, there is but one way for us all, but one refuge from the terrors of the Judgment, and that is to prepare for the coming of the Lord while the day of salvation lasteth. We can none of us have any one to flee unto for safety, but One alone: He Who will one day be our Judge, from the face of Whose majesty the heavens and earth shall flee away. He is still our most merciful Redeemer, bearing with us in our sins, patient with us in our iniquities, seeking by His wondrous long suffering to lead us to repentance. He yearns over us with a compassion too deep for human lips to tell. He entreats you, by us, to turn from all evil and to be reconciled to God. He strives within us by His blessed Spirit seeking to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; longing to save, reluctant to condemn; very pitiful and of tender mercy, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

But this coming to Him must be a definite coming. We must not be content with a mere internal act of the mind which people call “casting ourselves upon Christ.” We must come to Him through His own ordinances appointed for this very thing. He must be sought in the prayers and acts of His own Body, the Church. “Come ye,” as it is written in this very chapter, “and let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.” And to this end we multiply our services during the Advent Season, that men may thus seek Him and find

Him Who is our only hope—and may thus be taught to celebrate the commemoration of His first coming with a sacred joy, by gathering round His Holy Table and thus grow meet to sit down at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT, 1868.

GOD'S WORD MADE OF NONE EFFECT BY MAN'S TRADITION.

ST. MARK VII, 13.

"Making the word of God of none effect through your traditions."

The Saviour's rebuke to the Pharisees, which this text contains, arose from the fact that while Almighty God, by the mouth of His servant Moses, had distinctly commanded His people to honour their parents, a traditional explanation of this law made it without effect, by leading the people to suppose that they were complying with the Divine Will, at the very moment when they were openly disobeying the plain letter of the word of God. Now on this Sunday, the Church, by her services, leads us to consider the Holy Scriptures as a means of preparing for the second advent of our Lord—and doubtless one great reason why there is so little readiness for that event is, that though professing a great regard for Scripture, we do really to a very fearful extent make it of no effect by our traditions. The Bible speaks with great distinctness of a coming day, when the last fearful struggle shall take place between faith and unbelief, between Christ and Anti-Christ, and it seems to me, hardly possible to doubt, that this last strife is rapidly

approaching. It is clear from Holy Scripture that Anti-Christ is to be a great infidel power, and not any form of Christianity however corrupt we may esteem it to be. It may be thought strange that an *infidel* Anti-Christ should arise in a Christian country, or stranger still, that if he should do so he should find the multitudes to follow him which Scripture predicts. But we must bear in mind that the ultimate development of this great infidel power, will be only the completion of a system of unbelief, for which there has been a long preparation. That preparation is going on *now*. It is making great progress not only among those who are consciously laboring for this end, but among those who would be utterly shocked at the idea of infidelity. Now one of the most alarming signs of this state of things is apparent in the way in which Holy Scripture is treated by many of the educated and intellectual classes, and the manner in which it is made of none effect by corrupt traditions prevailing among the masses of the people. The tendencies of the former class have of late years become very definite and pronounced. They have found their most distinct utterances in the heretical publications of the deposed Bishop of Natal, Dr. Colenso, who pronounces the Old Testament to be "unhistorical," *i. e.* unworthy of belief, and who eliminates from, or drops out of the New Testament, those special doctrines of grace, which form the only hope and comfort of sinful men like ourselves.

He finds a large amount of sympathy and support among men of that school of thought, who are known as Broad Churchmen; men who in the celebrated "Essays and Reviews" gave such a specimen of what they called "*free handling*" of the Word of God as shocked every one who devoutly believes the Bible to be a revelation from heaven. It is much to be lamented, that the opinions of these persons are more or less adopted by many of the scientific men of the day, and by many of the younger members of the educated classes.

But the same evil tendency is manifesting itself everywhere, and (though in a more latent and insidious form) is making itself apparent among people who profess the most unbounded regard for the Bible, and claim to be distinctively and specially religious. The peculiar form in which this unbelieving spirit shews itself in the latter class, is in making the Word of God of none effect, because they do not take it just as it stands, but insist on understanding it, not according to its plain literal meaning, but according to tradition, *i. e.* to some erroneous explanation devised by some individual or party, and handed down as the true interpretation. Persons who accept these traditions, can sometimes be forced to acknowledge that Scripture does *say* things which are very contrary to their opinions, but they at once get out of the difficulty by falling back on their tradition which proves, (to them at least) that it does not *mean* what it says. Thus the authority of the Holy Scripture is being rapidly undermined, the force of its teachings is neutralized and the way prepared for the denial of its inspiration. Now the secret of this strong tendency, to make the Bible speak, not according to its own tenor, but in conformity with what we think it ought to say, is owing to weakness of faith, to a spirit of latent unbelief, and to the strong inclination, everywhere apparent, to judge of the credibility of its statements by the test of our *reason*. Prompted by these influences, we adopt a tradition or devise an explanation, which relieves us from the difficulties which we find in Holy Scriptures by explaining them away, and this applies both to doctrines and duties.

Take for example, the fact, that the Bible speaks constantly of something which it calls, "*the Kingdom of Heaven*" and "*the Kingdom of God*." Now what can this expression mean? It cannot (in a multitude of places) mean the Kingdom of Glory on High, for this simple reason that it is des-

cribed as being made up of good and bad. We are therefore forced to the conclusion that it must mean the Church of Christ on Earth. Now what does Holy Scripture say about this Kingdom. It says that it is like a net in which there are good fish and bad—like a field in which there are wheat and tares—like a vine with dead branches and living ones—like a company of ten virgins of whom five were wise and five were foolish—like a threshing floor whereon is lying wheat and chaff—it is a body, of which our Lord is the *Head*—a bride of whom He is the *Spouse*—a Kingdom of which he is the *King*, and this Kingdom was built up upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself, being the head corner stone. Therefore as the foundations of a building are its beginning, so this Kingdom must have had its commencement with those who were its founders, and it could not possibly have had any subsequent beginning—and the Kingdom thus begun was to have no End, but was to last for ever.

Now from these statements of Holy Scripture what inferences can be drawn but that the Church is *one*. Why? Because our Lord likens it to things that are one. *He* says it is like *a* field—*a* net—*a* threshing floor—*a* vine &c., &c. Next we must infer that it must be visible: why? because *He* says that it is *like* things which can be seen. Again it is clear that it must be made up of good and evil, for He says it is like a field with wheat and tares—a net with good fish and bad. It is further manifest that this *one visible* kingdom was begun by our Lord, in Judea, 1800 years ago, and the express promise of Holy Scriptures is that it should never be destroyed but that He should be with it always even unto the end of the world. Now as you all know, this is what Holy Scriptures *says*, but do the bulk of the people among us, who profess to prize the Scriptures, believe it? By no means. They scoff at it—they denounce it—they are

bitterly set against it: why? because they, unconsciously, make the Word of God of none effect by a most untenable tradition. They are indeed compelled by the force of Scripture to admit, though, in a sense altogether different from that of Holy Scripture that the kingdom of heaven, *i. e.* the Church of Christ on earth is one, but instead of being, as our Lord says it is, like something that can be seen, they hold it to be invisible. Instead of being made up of good and bad—wheat and tares, as our Lord calls them; they teach that this invisible church of their own devising, is made up of the good only; that its outward form is left to the mere will and inclination of men, that it may be rent into a thousand separate and complicating atoms, which may take their rise at any time or place, and through the instrumentality of any person, and then may pass away, to be reproduced again in some other form. The great doctrine of the unity of the Church, which is the Body of Christ, of which the Scripture emphatically says, that there is but “one body,” is made utterly without effect, by this most preposterous tradition. The practical result is, that we have multitudes of what are called “Churches” which were not founded by Christ, which did not originate in Judea, and which instead of dating back for more than 1800 years are but of yesterday. The consequence is that the Saviour’s dying prayer is not fulfilled. We are not *one*, and therefore the world does not believe that He came to be its Redeemer.

The very same thing can be conclusively proved with reference to the doctrines of Holy Baptism, Holy Communion and many others. The Scriptures speak clearly, positively, distinctly, but men stumble at its hard sayings and make them of none effect, through their corrupt traditions.

As it is with doctrines so it is with duties, but time will not allow me to dwell upon them. I shall refer only to one. Many able and earnest men have shown, as I believe, con-

clusively that Holy Scripture demands from Christians the tenth of all their increase for the honor of God, and I am aware of only one work in which this view of the subject has been attempted, to be formally disproved. That work has been answered over and over again; but do the bulk of those who are ever lauding the Holy Scriptures, believe what they say on this subject, and endeavour to practice the precepts which they confessedly contain? On the contrary, the notion of such obedience rather tends to excite the merriment of those who are exhorted to it and the Word of God, in this, as so in many other points, is made of none effect through human tradition. And as with doctrines and duties, so with sins. For example, though the Bible says that there should be no division amongst us, that there should be no schism in the Body of Christ, that we should be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment, that divisions are a great sin, the sign of a weak, carnal, sensual state and that those who cause them should be avoided; though the Bible says this and much more than this, do people really believe it? Not at all my Brethren, they laugh at or resent as bigotry the idea of regarding schism as a sin, and thus they make the Word of God of none effect by their tradition.

Now, my Christian Brethren, let me impress upon you that this is not only a great but it is a growing evil. These are not the only doctrines which are being undermined and denied in consequence of corrupt tradition. The doctrines of the Eternity of punishment, of the ever blessed Trinity, of the Atonement and Divinity of our Lord are being exposed to the same influences, and those who are trying to lead the popular mind in this direction will not be satisfied until they banish from the minds of their followers the idea that there is anything supernatural in Christianity, and if that be the case it is not worth contending for.

Take away the truth of the Bible, either by direct assault or by corrupt tradition, and you leave us upon the dark and stormy sea of this life without compass to steer by, or rudder to direct us. We cannot then be ready for the judgment for we know not whether there is to be a judgment at all, nor can we be sure even of the existence of another life. There can be no hope for us amidst our sins, no comfort in our sorrows, no peace amid the manifold perturbations of this uneasy life, because all assurance of future pardon, and rest and glory would then be taken away. As then we value all the inestimable blessings which our Holy Faith confers, as we hope for calmness on the bed of death and a holy boldness on the day of judgment, let us hold fast to every tittle of the Word of God. Let us beware how we venture to explain away its explicit language under the influence of popular and erroneous tradition, and when doubt,—real, honest, anxious doubt as to what our Lord's will is, arises in our mind, let us remember that the Church of Christ is the keeper of Holy Writ and the witness as to its true meaning, and that she is of authority in controversies of faith. How it is that she gives her decision on controverted points, and the reasonableness and safety of yielding to her authority may perhaps engage our attention upon Sunday evening next.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE REASONABLENESS OF ACCEPTING THE CHURCH'S INTERPRETATION OF HOLY SCRIPTURES.

I TIMOTHY, III, 15.

"The Church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth."

The teachings of the Advent season are perhaps the clearest and most definite in the Prayer Book. The thought of the coming judgment, kept up by the constant repetition of the collect for the first Sunday, pervades all the services like a solemn undertone. On the second Sunday, the Word of God, and on this, the third Sunday, the Church of God are then set before us as the Divinely appointed means of preparing for that judgment; while on the concluding Sunday the result which ought to flow from the proper use of these means is suggested to us, viz: the bringing each of us into closer communion with our Lord so that by His strength we may gain the victory over those evils which hinder us in running the race set before us, even our own sins and wickedness.

On Sunday morning last I spoke of the Holy Scriptures and endeavored to show how men are at the present day making them of none effect by their traditions, *i. e.*, their explanations of the Word of God, which, instead of interpreting it, really explain away and neutralize its true meaning. Now we must remember that the true *meaning* of Scripture is Scripture, but the great difficulty is—on the theory on which men in the present day generally proceed—to find out what that true meaning is; and that difficulty arises in a great measure because people have explained away such a passage as that contained in the text. They have lost all

idea of the Church as a living body—the body of Christ. They have made the Scripture doctrine concerning it of none effect by their tradition.

The popular idea, widely prevalent at present, is that God revealed Himself to mankind by means of a book, viz., the Bible—that those who wrote it, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, had not much more to do with it than the pens by which it was written; that being thus written it became the duty of every man to read this book and to form his own faith from it; that having done so, they were to assemble and form a church in agreement with their idea of its directions, and to receive its doctrines and precepts as they severally understood them. Each person is to interpret the Book for himself, and the theory in the minds of most men among us at the present day, is that that we *do*, in some way, think for ourselves in religion with the Bible only as our authority. It is not true—it is a mere fallacy which people practice upon themselves, but they like to fancy that it is so. The fact is, and it is one for which we should be deeply thankful, that the majority of earnest persons—whether they are conscious of it or not—accept the Bible very much in the sense which the church gives it—reading it in the only rational way, viz: in the light of the creeds, catechism and liturgy of the Church which Holy Scripture says is the Pillar and Ground of the truth.

Now let us look for a moment at this theory which is in such high favor with the multitude, and at some of the results flowing from it. According to it, every man is to interpret the Bible for himself. I will not dwell on the very important fact of the impossibility of every man being able to prove satisfactorily that what we call the Bible is really such. There is no doubt that it is so, but it is impossible for every man to *prove* it by his own unaided powers and reason. But, supposing that point is granted, how is

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every man to ascertain and decide upon its true meaning? "Oh," people say, "you have only to read it carefully and pray for guidance and you will be sure to be led to the truth." That is easily said, but is it true? If it is, how are we to account for the indisputable fact that men of honesty, learning and devoutness differ so widely? Churchmen, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists, Congregationalists, Unitarians, Universalists, and many more, read it earnestly, and pray over it devoutly, and yet they come to conclusions as to its meaning which are utterly and absolutely irreconcilable. In point of fact it is a Book which is, and (if it is what we hold it to be) must be, very deep and difficult. It is not, whatever men may say, to be treated "like any other book," and its difficulty and mysteriousness is evident from the one undeniable fact of the variety of interpretation, of which it is the subject. If there was no difficulty in understanding it; if "every man" is competent to do so, there would be no difference of opinion regarding its meaning. In fact, as you remember, St. Peter says expressly that it *is* difficult, and because of this difficulty it is also dangerous, unless properly used. He says that in some parts are "things hard to be understood." Here is the acknowledgment of the difficulty, and these difficult passages, he adds, "they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they also the other Scriptures do to their own destruction," which is surely a sufficiently alarming statement concerning the danger of the misuse of the Word of God. This, I repeat, is what St. Peter, speaking by the Holy Ghost, distinctly asserts—but I shall not be in the least surprised to hear next week that, as the penalty of quoting his words, I am charged with stating publicly that it is a highly dangerous thing for the people generally to read the Bible, which, of course, is exactly contrary both to what I think and what I say. But though this is the statement of St.

Peter, few men now-a-days, however, unlearned or unstable, hesitate to set themselves up as the final judges—each, in his own case—of what is scriptural or unscriptural, and hence what one man declares to be in accordance with the Word of God, the next asserts to be rank heresy; and, if one of these be equal to the other in general intelligence and honesty of purpose, it is very difficult to see why, upon the popular theory of every man being his own interpreter—one is not just as likely to be right as the other.

A great stir has of late years been made by the publications of Dr. Colenso. He is a man whose native powers of intellect are undoubtedly great. His attainments in some branches of science are conspicuous, and his general acquirements far above the average. He must also be a sincere and bold man or he would never, for the sake of his convictions, have ventured to place himself in such a position or have incurred such a storm of opposition as he has voluntarily done. But it is hard to see why—on the popular theory, mind—he should be so denounced. He has only done what that theory loudly declares is a right thing to do. He has examined the Scriptures for himself and formed his own opinions of them and from them. You think his opinions wrong. *I* am certain they are heretical; but on what do we base this conviction? Are *we* better able to interpret Scripture than he is? Are we so superior to him in powers and attainments that our views must be right and his wrong? Have we given any greater evidence of sincerity than he has done? and, if not, if on the contrary, in all these particulars, we, as individuals, stand far below him, why should not *HE* be more likely to be right than we are, *i. e.*, if it be right for every man to take up the Holy Scriptures and receive and explain them according to his own private interpretation. Now though it be flying in the very face of popular opinion, I have no hesitation in saying that what this

prevailing theory requires as a right thing to do—is a *wrong* thing ; a thing that God never intended that we should do, and I assert that the Holy Scriptures should be devoutly read, but with quite another purpose than that of each one manufacturing from them a system of opinion and doctrine for himself.

For example, I have no manner of doubt or question that the writer who has been referred to is a heretic in the Scripture sense of the term ; that he has assaulted the very foundations of Christianity, and that he has done what in him lies to take the very heart out of the Gospel ; but the absolute firmness of this conclusion could not possibly arise from any idea of equality, with much less superiority to the writer alluded to, either in original mental power or in those attainments which fit us for the investigation of difficult subjects. On the contrary, there is no comparison to be made in the case, but that fact does not in the least degree disturb the absolute rest with which I entertain my convictions, because I base them not on anything so utterly weak and worthless as my individual powers of settling such questions, but on the immoveable foundation of the decisions of the whole Church of the living God—that Church which the Scripture says is the Pillar and Ground of the truth.

Now, let me try to show you why we hold it to be a most reasonable thing thus to rest upon the decisions of the Church of God. That our Heavenly Father revealed Himself to mankind by means of a book is simply not true. He never has done what (on the popular theory referred to) many well meaning people suppose Him to have done. He revealed Himself to us, the Scripture says, by His Son—“ God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.” That Blessed Son Who is Himself the Truth, and by Whom grace and truth came, committed the deposit of the faith to those chosen men whom

He had chosen, and whom alone He appointed and commissioned to build up, rule and teach His Church. "Go YE," He said, "and make disciples of all nations. Go YE and baptize them. Go YE and TEACH them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo I am with you (and with you only) always, even unto the end of the world." They obeyed this Divine command—they organized, developed and governed His Church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. The truth at that time could have no other possible ground or pillar, for the world was lying in darkness. By the instrumentality of those whom our Lord appointed, multitudes were brought into it, trained in the ways of holiness, and fitted for the hour of death and for the Day of Judgment, who never saw one word of the New Testament, for the best of all reasons, that not one word of it was written. Yet inasmuch as they were taught by those who were commissioned by our Lord and inspired by His Spirit, no one, I suppose, doubts that they held the faith in its purity and completeness. But since the fallibility of man was likely to corrupt the faith, it became necessary in course of time, that the history of our Lord's life should be written, and certain epistles, growing out of various exigencies of the time, were, in the course of years, addressed by the Apostles to several branches of the one Church which they had founded and instructed in the faith. These writings were eventually declared by the Church to be inspired by the Holy Ghost and to set forth Divine proof and evidence of those truths which she was commissioned to teach. It never entered the mind of any primitive christian that he was to take these writings and form from them his own creed, irrespective of the teachings and authority of the Church which placed them in his hands. St. Luke, you remember, expressly says that having had perfect understanding of all things from the very beginning, he had undertaken to set them

forth in his Gospel. Why? That those to whom he wrote might know the certainty of those things wherein THEY HAD BEEN instructed, *i. e.* had been instructed by the already existing Church long before the Gospel had been written. If any one had taken these writings (as so many in later years have done) and worked out from them a sense altogether different from that in which the disciples had been previously instructed, it must necessarily have been a wrong sense. It might, by some specious and ingenious wresting of the words, be made to *look* as if it was supported by Scripture, but it could not be so, for those who by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost had taught the disciples before the Scriptures were written, could not, by the inspiration of the same Spirit, have instructed them in a different and conflicting set of truths in the New Testament. The real meaning of Scripture (which alone is Scripture) must have been known to those to whom it was originally addressed, because they were fully instructed by those by whom it was written, and therefore we are safe only when we receive it and understand it in the sense in which it is held by the Church of the Living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. And now, although I must trespass somewhat on your patience by detaining you a little longer than it is our custom to do, I am unwilling to leave my argument incomplete, which would necessarily be the case if I was to stop now. The subject is important, and ought not to be without interest, seeing that it refers to a matter which has been a source of perplexity to many honest minded persons. Any one who has followed the train of reasoning which I am endeavoring to set forth, will probably say, that after all, the difficulty has been removed only one step further off, but has met with no solution. The question was how shall we know the true meaning of Holy Scripture? and we are told that we are to understand it in the sense held by the Church. But how are

we to be certain what that sense is, and which of the conflicting branches of the Church we are to obey? The Oriental or Greek Church, by refusing to accept certain words in the Nicene creed, seems to deny that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father—the Roman Church imposes on its members the new dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin; the Anglican Church sets forth much that many pious nonconformists reject. A so-called Œcumenical Council is next year to be held in Rome, and judging from the past, it may set forth some new article of faith which was never heard of before. Are people to accept that, too, as the true sense of Scripture? These are perfectly reasonable questions, and the answer to them is contained in the famous rule of Tertullian, a writer of the second century, which is this: "Whatever is first is true, whatever is later is adulterate." Since the Church of the living God has by man's sins been rent into three parts, the Greek, Roman and Anglican, she has lost her voice, (so to speak), or if she speaks she has not the assurance which she once possessed of speaking rightly. The promise of being led into all truth cannot be justly claimed by any one part of the Church, because it was given to the whole and not to any particular section of it. It is only those interpretations of the Holy Scriptures therefore which she gave when she was one and undivided, that are of unquestionable authority. When in God's good time she shall again be *one*, she will be enabled once more to speak with a voice unhesitating and irresistible, but not before. But thank God we do not need any fresh definitions of the faith. It was once for all delivered to the Saints long before Holy Scripture was written; and in her undivided days the Church, the pillar and ground of truth, told us what that faith was with perfect distinctness and appeals to the Word of God to prove the certainty of those things in which she instructs us. She

has spoken in the ancient Catholic creeds, in her liturgies, formularies, sacraments and rites, and from these we may, if we will, readily and certainly learn her decisions on all the great articles of the faith. This is the doctrine of the Church of England on the subject, as every one may see who will examine the XXth Art., wherein it is said that the Church is the keeper or guardian of Holy Scripture—the witness to its true meaning and is of authority in controversies of faith: i.e. she has authority to decide them, and yet that it is not lawful for her because it would be a violation of her special office, to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, or so to expound one place of Scripture as to be repugnant to another. But, how, it will be asked, does she exert this authority and express her decision on controverted points? That is a question not hard to answer. There is e.g.: a long standing controversy about the government of the Church by Bishops, Priests and Deacons. She decides the point for us with no hesitating voice. She says: "It is evident unto all men, diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient authors that from the *Apostles* times there have been these orders of ministers in Christ's Church, Bishops, Priests and Deacons." (pref. to ordinal in the Prayer Book.) There is another controversy about infant baptism. She gives her interpretation of Holy Scripture on the point by ordering that her people shall not delay the baptism of their children longer than the first or second Sunday after their birth. There is another dispute about the effect of baptism; but her decision is most clear and definite for she requires her ministers, after the baptism of every child, to thank God that He hath been pleased to regenerate that child by His Holy Spirit. There is another controversy about the benefits of the Holy Communion and the reality of Christ's presence. She decides the controversy by saying that we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood, which she fur-

ther asserts are *verily and indeed* taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper. So with the Calvinist, the Unitarian and Universalist controversies. She speaks on these subjects with a clear and definite voice, and these decisions are not those of the Church of England only, but of the whole Catholic Church. They were unquestioned within her vast and undivided communion for 1,500 years. Christians from the beginning had been instructed in them by the Church, and Holy Scripture was afterwards written that they might know the certainty of those things in which they had been previously instructed. A few men arose some 1500 years after Christ and set themselves to deny the teachings of the Primitive Church on these points and drew from the Holy Scripture a new sense which had never been heard of before, and which, being new, must consequently be false. Against the presumption of such a proceeding, the English branch of the Catholic Church emphatically protests. She warns her clergy that they teach nothing but what is in agreement with the doctrine of "the ancient fathers and Catholic doctors (i. e., teachers) of the Church," for she holds it to be a monstrous supposition that the Church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth, should everywhere have been wrong for 1500 years, and that Christ should, contrary to His own promise, have allowed the gates of Hell to prevail against it, which would have been the case had she been allowed to deny the faith.

The reply to all this is a very natural one, and is doubtless present at this moment in the minds of many of those who have taken the trouble to follow the argument which has been set before them. It is this: how can all this be so plain and definite as you endeavor to make out, when it is a fact which is notorious that many, even among the clergy themselves, hold the most opposite opinions on many of these points? That is simply the result of men preferring their

own private interpretations to the teaching and theory of the Church, and this leads me to conclude with one piece of plain, practical advice. When a clergyman is officiating in the reading desk, at the font, or at the altar, his voice is the voice of the Church; for he is allowed to add nothing of his own to her creeds, offices or liturgy; but in private conversation, or in the pulpit, it is his own voice and therefore you have no security against error, unless his words are in agreement with those of the Church, because he may choose to put his own private interpretation upon the Holy Scripture instead of taking her explanation of it. Therefore it is a safe rule always to believe him when in the desk, or elsewhere, he uses the Divine offices, and *ALWAYS* *dis*believe him when in the pulpit he contradicts what he had uttered when speaking as the mouth-piece of the Church.

Such things unhappily do happen. A clergyman will, at the font, thank God that it hath pleased God to regenerate some child whom he has just baptised, and in the pulpit will immediately afterwards declare that to suppose that children are necessarily regenerated in baptism is "a soul destroying heresy." Both cannot possibly be right. Which is most likely to be so—the whole Church of the living God, in all time and in every place—the Church which St. Paul says is the pillar and ground of the truth, or the individual clergyman who, on the strength of his own personal infallibility, undertakes to pronounce her wrong?

My sermon has been a long chain of dry and, perhaps to some, rather hard reasoning, and I have now no time and you can have no patience for exhortation or what is called "practical application." I hope, however, on Sunday morning next, D. V., to point out (if I shall find the time for the necessary preparation) what ought to be the effect upon our souls, of a due, reverent and reasonable use of the Word of God and of the Church of God. I have endeavored to be

as clear and explicit as possible. I set forth these views in no spirit of dogmatism ; I simply state them as conclusions to which honest thought and such poor reading as a busy life permits, has brought the mind of one who has not been insensible to the doubts and difficulties which encompass so important a subject, and I pray God that they may be instrumental in leading others to the same restfulness of mind, which they have conferred upon myself. The Word of God is the sheet anchor of our hopes in these dangerous days, but its value depends upon our understanding it rightly. Take away from us its blessed light, or misinterpret its holy teachings, and we are left without comfort in this life and without hope for the life to come.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

"THE WORD OF GOD" AND "THE CHURCH OF GOD" THE NECESSARY
MEANS OF SALVATION.

ST. JOHN, XV, 5.

"I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without Me ye can do nothing."

I have lately expressed, with such clearness of thought and diction as I am able to command, my own conviction, that there is little real practical readiness amongst us for the coming of the Lord—that though He may be at hand, even at the door, the whole tone of our devotion is miserably low—that there is a terrible spirit of utter worldliness rife around us—that we shrink painfully from the thought self-denial and entire consecration to the service of our Lord ; that any unusual earnestness and devotedness of life when it is met with, tends to excite ridicule, when it does not

call forth censure and opposition. For now well nigh thirty years I have been brought into close contact with the ordinary mind in sacred things, and the conclusion is often forced upon me that there is something in the whole tone of popular christianity so unlike its primitive pattern—so different from that literal representation of it which we find in Holy Scripture, that the two are hardly to be recognized as being the same even in many of their leading principles.

When, on all sides, instead of living as brethren in the same blessed household of faith—instead of dwelling together in unity, and with one mind and one mouth glorifying God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we find bitter strife and heartburnings, rife among the professed followers of the Prince of Peace, separations and divisions of the most aggravated character, growing out of causes the most trivial and insignificant, controversies and janglings about opinions drawn by private interpretation from the Scriptures—opinions which are diametrically the opposites of each other, and which being absolutely beyond the possibility of reconciliation, cannot possibly be true. When I say this spectacle is everywhere, and every day to be met with, I confess that to me it is no great wonder that many sincere people begin to doubt, whether christianity (as they see and understand it) is really the divine and blessed thing which it is said to be. And I am ready further to acknowledge, that my sorrow has been greater than my surprise when, in going from door to door in this town, I have been told by intelligent men, generally of the artizan class, (a class who, though they may not have the opportunity of gaining large views on such subjects, exercise a considerable amount of independent thought) to be told, I say, by such men, that before I undertook to instruct them in the truths of the Bible, it would be well to assemble the teachers of the eighteen or

twenty "denominations" into which christians are here divided, each holding opinions conflicting with all the others; and when as the result of our conference we had come to a unanimous agreement as to what the Bible meant, *then* it would be time enough to commence the work of their instruction. And what is this but the perfectly legitimate result of the licentious exercise of incompetent private opinion, leading to the reception or formation of those traditions, *i.e.*, those explanations of the Word of God, which make it of none effect, either by obscuring its meaning or utterly explaining away its true and literal sense. Now, (as on Sunday last I sought to show) this conflict of opinion, destroying as it does all certainty as regards truth, grows naturally and inevitably from the fact, that men, popularly speaking, have gradually lost all idea of the continued, outward, visible existence of that divine and spiritual kingdom which the God of Heaven was to set up on earth, and which should never be destroyed. The true vine—of which our Lord is the root—His body mystical, the church—the trunk, and we who by holy baptism have been grafted into it—the branches—the Church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. They have substituted for it, societies of their own formation, whose origin features, history and fate prove them to be purely human, and not divine: The "Churches" of *men*, but not "*the* Church of the living God." With this wide-spread loss of all scriptural notion of the Church, there necessarily follows the loss of all idea of her office as the keeper, the witness, and the divinely-appointed interpreter of Holy writ, and the result is that men, trying to understand the Bible by their own unaided power have to a great extent failed to do so, and have put almost as many different and conflicting meanings upon it as there are different minds. They have attempted to attain a most

important end, but they have left out one element which is essentially necessary to the success of their attempt.

The truth which Almighty God revealed by His blessed Son—the Faith which was once for all delivered to the saints—and by the heartfelt reception and practice of which we are to have our Lord come among us by a spiritual advent, and so to incorporate His strength with our weakness, as to help us against our own sins and wickedness, was to be preserved pure, unadulterated, and unchanged by the proper and perpetual use of two of God's most precious gifts to us—first, the Word of God, kept and explained by the other great gift, viz., the Church of God. Men in their self-sufficiency have chosen to make the foolish and futile attempt of securing this great end by the use of one of these means only, and the result is, the confusion, uncertainty and contradiction; the alienation and bitterness of spirit which now so painfully distinguishes popular christianity.

When Almighty God has ordained *two* means, both of which are, by His appointment, essential to the attainment of any specific end, whether temporal or spiritual, and men either in ignorance or self-sufficiency choose to use only one, then they have no one but themselves to blame for any unhappy consequences which may arise, because it is clearly the fruit of their own voluntary action. Our bodily life, *e.g.*, is supported by two means—food and drink. Both of these, in due proportion and combination, are essential to our healthy existence. If we used one of them only, then, irrespective of the evil consequences following directly from the loss of the other, the one of which we did partake, and which was intended to promote our welfare would produce, from want of combination with the other, results of the most distressing and fatal character. Scientific men can easily prove to us that the air we breathe, and which is so proverbially necessary to our life, is com-

pounded chiefly of two ingredients, which are easily separable. If we were to breathe one only of the elements of which it is composed, suffering and death would be the consequence. It is only when the two are properly combined that the end is secured, viz., the maintenance of life.

Now it has pleased God that our spiritual life should also be supported by the combination of two divine ingredients, viz., the Word of God and the Church of God. If we separate the two—if we destroy their combination by using them in a manner which God did not intend, then from the use of *one*, however honestly or devoutly used, we shall not obtain, and it is vain for us to expect to obtain, those beneficial results which would flow from the right use of both in combination.

This is not a mere theory, but a fact which really admits of no question.

For the proof of it, look first to the large and numerous Non-conformist bodies who have forsaken the ancient and historic Church, and set up the various organizations which they, in the exercise of their private judgement think, strangely enough, to be more in accordance with the mind of Christ than the Church founded by Himself. They take one of the two elements necessary for our salvation, viz., the Word of God ; and no one, unless lost to all sense of christian candour, can doubt the earnestness, honesty and deep devotedness with which it is used by multitudes among them ; but the aggregate result of their attempts to interpret the Word of God without the Church of God, is that almost infinite diversity of conflicting views which has been referred to, and which is producing in many minds very grave doubts as to the truth of christianity itself. Look now at the Roman branch of the Church. She professes great reverence for the Word of God, but practically she has taken it away from the people, and thus they, having to a

great extent only the Church of God, suffer the inevitable consequence of separating what God has joined together in those assumptions, corruptions and novelties which at this moment form the greatest obstacle to the re-union of Christendom, on the principles of the Primitive and Catholic Faith.

And now let us see where we have got to. A sound faith, even that faith which was delivered to the saints, is essential to a holy life ; but this faith, as far as we can see, could not possibly have been maintained amidst this evil world without "the Word of God." But even the Word of God would not answer its purpose, unless its *true meaning* was preserved, and, therefore, for this purpose, the Church of God was constituted its authorized interpreter, an office she discharges in the manner and under the limitations and conditions which I endeavored to explain on Sunday evening last.

Some persons who have not thought much on these subjects, and who, without thought, are willing to accept as correct any crude theory which may happen to prevail around them, may perhaps be shocked to hear it said that anything is needful for our spiritual welfare but the Bible, and the Bible alone. "Are not the Scriptures," such people say, "able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith, in Christ Jesus, and what can we want more than that? Does not Christ dwell in the heart by faith, which is the gift of God, and if so, why thus attempt to magnify the office of the Church?" The reply to these questions is very simple, and it is this: that the Bible itself, human experience and common sense combined, serve to shew, that without the Church of God, the Word of God could not be obeyed. Who, that has any trace of christian earnestness within him, but knows and feels that we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, by reason

of our own sins and wickedness? Who has not been distressed and cast down by the sense of his own weakness to overcome what is evil, produced by the breaking of his strongest resolutions against it? Who is insensible to his own coldness and deadness in prayer, and to his want of deep, conscious, constraining love to Christ? Now who can save us from ourselves but Him, and how is *He* to do it unless He raises up *His* power and comes among us—yea, into us—and with great might succours us? And how is that succour given but by union with Him; by His making Himself *one* with us, so that we who, severed from Him can do nothing, may be enabled to do all things through Christ, that strengtheneth us? Now, if the Holy Scriptures teach us anything distinctly, it is that this union is brought about by the instrumentality of those means of grace which Christ Himself appointed for this very end, and which are administered only in and by His Church. How were the first believers added to the church? How grafted into the True Vine, from Whom alone they could derive the spiritual life which was to make them fruitful in holiness—how but by being baptized into Christ, and thus, as St. Paul says, “putting on Christ.” And how is the union, or incorporation thus effected to be maintained or kept up, but by worthy and continual participation in that heavenly food which makes or keeps us one with Christ—“He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood dwelleth in Me and I in him.” Our Lord in Holy Scripture commands us to observe these His ordinances; but to obey these precepts of “the Word of God” we must have “the Church of God,” for nowhere else can we be sure of finding either baptism or the supper of the Lord, both of which are generally necessary to salvation. It will not do to say that faith alone will suffice, for a faith which does not lead to obedience is a dead faith. The faith of the 3,000 converted by

St. Peter led them immediately to be baptized. and so with all those of whom we read in the Holy Scriptures. But this could not have been, unless there had been the duly commissioned officers of the Church, authorized to baptize them, and afterwards to break to them the bread of life in the Holy Eucharist. Is any one allowed to do these things? surely not. Only those whom our Lord sent, and commissioned to send others, saying "Go ye and baptize—go ye and teach." As long, my christian brethren, as the Bible lasts, it will be a vain attempt to ignore the Church, and suppose that any half dozen people who choose to assemble together can, if they please, constitute themselves into a society for the administration of God's sacraments. Men could just as easily make a new Bible as a new Church. She is not of human, but of heavenly workmanship. She is as a ship sailing over the sea of this evil, stormy world, amid whose wild waves of sin and unbelief the souls of men are perishing. Christ, by His ministers within the ship, throws—so to speak—the rope of His ordinances to those struggling in the waters, in hope of saving them. Faith is the hand by which they lay hold upon this rope: and thus we see why it is that without faith we cannot be saved, for without it we can no more be drawn to Christ than a drowning man could, without hands, grasp the rope thrown to him in the waters. Christ is our *only* Saviour. *We*, notwithstanding all our provocations, are the sinners who, at the price of His most precious blood, He vouchsafes to save, and the means or instruments by which it pleases Him to save us are those ordinances which He has appointed in His church for this very end. He might, if He had so pleased, have appointed a thousand other means of bringing us into union with Himself; but He in His love and wisdom, has not seen fit to do so, and it will not do for us to neglect His ways for others of our own devising. God's

Word and God's Church are the means appointed for our salvation, and it is by the loving, trusting, reverent and devout use of both that we are alone warranted in believing that we shall really be ready for the judgment of the great day. It is because we fail to understand and to use both, that christianity displays the melancholy spectacle which it now exhibits, and that the standard of our spiritual life is so wretchedly low and stunted.

We, who through God's great mercy have been led to a fuller, firmer grasp of these truths, have a high mission to fulfil, though its nature is often grotesquely misunderstood. People look at our love for the decencies of divine worship, at our efforts to adorn the house of prayer, or to bear ourselves devoutly in the presence of the Most High, and they think and say that these outward things are all we care for. They seem incapable of comprehending that these things are but the outermost fringe of our inner life, the mere trivial external indications of our having, through God's grace, been awakened to the unspeakable importance of an awfully forgotten part of God's eternal Truth. The great mission which has been divinely committed to us is to make men recognize the great fact that the means by which we are to be brought into union, and kept in real close living communion with the Lord, is through the instrumentality of His Body the Church. Men at this day profess to value the Word of God; but losing, as they have done, its true meaning, they begin to doubt its authority, and it is our work to make them see that in the Church of God we have a divinely authorized interpreter of the Word of God, and that by the combined action of both we are to be saved from error of doctrine, and viciousness of life, and made ready for the day of judgment. We shall be (as we are) denounced and suspected, feared, and calumniated, as was our Master of old, but we *shall* succeed as surely as truth gains

the victory in its conflict with error ; as certainly as the brightness of the day banishes the obscurity of night. And now one word only to those who sympathize with us in our work. Let not your sympathy be a merely intellectual one. Let us by our spirit, our life, our actions, show beyond all dispute, that this movement is deeply, truly, earnestly religious. Oh, I dread, in my own case, and in the case of others, a mere assent, a mere mental recognition of the truth, that our loving Lord is yet among us by His Mystical Body, and that it should have no effect on our hearts and conduct. O ye, who know that you are branches in the True Vine, see that ye so abide in Him, that ye bring forth much fruit. Let your love for His church lead you to prove its sincerity, by following the holy footsteps of His life Who is Her Head and Lord ; and thus shall we hasten the blessed day, when there shall be one Fold and one Shepherd, and when Zion shall be built as a city that is at unity in itself.

